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UNCLAS BRATISLAVA 000462

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR R; PA; IIP/G/EUR; NEA/PD; EUR/PPD -
MHARALAMBAKIS AND MHURLEY
EMBASSIES FOR PAO
PRAGUE, BUDAPEST AND WARSAW FOR AMBASSADOR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [LO](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: GETTING THE GOOD NEWS OUT ON IRAQ

1. SUMMARY: THE COUNTRY TEAM AND I HAVE FOUND, THROUGH OUR OUTREACH EFFORTS AROUND SLOVAKIA, THAT PEOPLE ARE NOT GETTING ENOUGH FACTUAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE POSITIVE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE COALITION'S EFFORTS IN IRAQ. SLOVAK EDITORIAL OPINION HAS SO FAR REMAINED PREDOMINANTLY ON OUR SIDE. ON THE OTHER HAND, PUBLIC OPINION, WHICH SUPPORTS WITHDRAWAL OF SLOVAK TROOPS FROM IRAQ, IS CAUSING POLITICAL LEADERS TO BEGIN TO ASK FOR DISCUSSIONS ON THIS ISSUE. MUCH OF THIS PRESSURE IS BECAUSE THE NEWS MEDIA CONTAINS MOSTLY INFORMATION ON FIGHTING AND CASUALTIES AND NOT ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN REBUILDING IRAQ AND PREPARING IT FOR DEMOCRATIC SELF-RULE. THEREFORE, PUBLIC IMPRESSIONS ARE THAT TROOPS ARE IN IRAQ TO FIGHT A WAR AND NOT TO STABILIZE THE COUNTRY FOR THE REBUILDING EFFORTS AND THE CREATION OF A DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT. THE RECENT ROUNDTABLES FOR CENTRAL EUROPEAN JOURNALISTS WITH SECRETARY POWELL AND SECRETARY RUMSFELD WERE ENORMOUSLY SUCCESSFUL IN

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GETTING FRONT-PAGE STORIES, BUT THE NUMBER OF THOSE OPPORTUNITIES IS LIMITED. WE ARE LOOKING FOR MORE WAYS TO REACH A LARGER AUDIENCE, GIVEN THE RESOURCE LIMITATIONS OF OUR POST. END SUMMARY.

2. MEMBERS OF COUNTRY TEAM AND I BELIEVE THERE ARE CERTAIN ADDITIONAL TOOLS THE DEPARTMENT COULD PROVIDE THAT WOULD BE OF ASSISTANCE TO US AND SIMILAR POSTS IN CENTRAL EUROPE AND ELSEWHERE:

A) MORE GENERIC OP-EDS FOR PLACEMENT UNDER THE AMBASSADOR'S NAME. THE GENERAL CONSENSUS AMONG PEOPLE IN THE PUBLIC OPINION BUSINESS IS THAT ARTICLES BY THE U.S. AMBASSADOR ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE READ THAN ARTICLES BY A HIGHER-RANKING AMERICAN LEADER WITH NO LOCAL TIES.

WE DO NOT HAVE THE STAFF OR RESOURCES TO WRITE OP-EDS FROM SCRATCH, AND IT SEEMS INEFFICIENT FOR EVERY POST TO BE WRITING ITS OWN. WE WOULD MAKE GOOD USE OF MORE GENERIC OP-EDS THAT EXPLAIN THE COALITION MISSION AND THAT HIGHLIGHT SOME OF THE "GOOD NEWS" ASPECTS THAT ARE NOT GETTING THROUGH IN DAILY NEWS STORIES.

B) OFFICIAL SPEAKERS: WE COULD MAKE GOOD USE OF OFFICIAL USG SPEAKERS WHO ARE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT THE FACTS ON THE GROUND IN IRAQ AND CAN REFUTE MISINFORMATION AND INCORRECT PERCEPTIONS. WHAT WE NEED IS SPEAKERS WHO CAN PROVIDE VIVID EXAMPLES AND WHO WOULD MAKE GOOD GUESTS ON TELEVISION TALK SHOWS, GOOD INTERVIEW SUBJECTS FOR THE PRESS, AND GOOD SPEAKERS IN PUBLIC FORUMS. A FEW WELL-CHOSEN SPEAKERS TRAVELING TO VARIOUS POSTS COULD MAKE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION.

WHILE IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO SECURE PEOPLE THROUGH THE P.A. SPEAKERS PROGRAM, THAT PROGRAM RELIES ON SPEAKERS WHO SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES AND NOT AS OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT SPOKESPERSONS. WE HAVE LIMITED RESOURCES TO FUND SPEAKERS (OUR FY-04 FUNDS ARE ALREADY EXHAUSTED), AND SPEAKERS COULD BE BETTER UTILIZED IN THIS CASE BY VISITING MULTIPLE COUNTRIES.

C) DIGITAL VIDEO CONFERENCES ARE USUALLY DEMAND-DRIVEN, BUT IT COULD BE USEFUL TO TRY A SUPPLY-DRIVEN APPROACH. FOR EXAMPLE, SOMEONE WITH A COMPELLING STORY TO TELL ABOUT THE REVIVAL OF THE HOSPITAL SECTOR IN IRAQ COULD BE OFFERED TO POSTS AS A DVC GUEST.

3. WE LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH THE DEPARTMENT IN ADDRESSING THIS PUBLIC INFORMATION ISSUE.

THAYER

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